DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 023 SO 032 435

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TITLE	What Do We Know about Sexual Harassment in Public Schools? Equity.
INSTITUTION	Ohio State Univ., Columbus.
SPONS AGENCY	Ohio State Dept. of Education, Columbus. Div. of Career-Technical and Adult Education.
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	PL-101-392
AVAILABLE FROM	Gender Equity, Ohio Career-Technical and Adult Education, Ohio Department of Education, 65 South Front Street, Columbus, OH 43215-4183; Tel: 614-644-6238.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; Gender Issues; *Public Schools; *School Culture; *School Personnel; *Sex Fairness; *Sexual Harassment; Student Surveys
IDENTIFIERS	*Ohio; Title IX Education Amendments 1972

ABSTRACT

This brief report discusses sexual harassment in public schools and presents six recommendations for all school personnel to follow to help lower the incidence of sexual harassment. The report provides a definition of sexual harassment and cites several provisions of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Contains three resources for information. (BT)

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What Do We Know About Sexual Harassment in Public Schools?

Research

Four in five (81%) 8th through 11th grade public school students have experienced some form of sexual harassment in their school lives. Of these, 85 percent were girls and 76 percent were boys (Harris, Louis, and Associates, 1993).

In an unscientific survey of 6,173 Ohio students in grades 9-12, up to 69 percent of those responding said they have experienced some form of sexual harassment in school (Vocational Sex Equity, 1998). (See table below.)

Boys indicate that homophobic harassment is the most bothersome for them; girls indicate that verbal and physical sexual harassment is the most bothersome for them (Harris, Louis, and Associates, 1993).

Harassment creates situations where students do not want to go to school or talk as much in class. Harassed students find it hard to pay attention in school and often stay home from school (Harris, Louis, and Associates, 1993).

Only seven percent of students who have been harassed say they have told a teacher, while 23 percent say they told a family member and another 23 percent say they told no one (Harris, Louis, and Associates, 1993).

Teachers and school officials often downplay the significance of sexual harassment among students, not only looking the other way, but standing by as girls are harassed in front of them in classrooms and school corridors (Phillips, 1998).

Only 45 percent of students in the Ohio survey reported that they would feel comfortable reporting sexual harassment to school authorities (Vocational Sex Equity, 1998).

Fifty-seven percent of students in the Ohio survey were either unsure or agreed that nothing would happen to the individual who harassed them if they reported it to a school authority (Vocational Sex Equity, 1998).

Recommendations

- Educate all school personnel, including teachers, administrators, support staff, and custodians about sexual harassment legislation such as Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- Act quickly and responsibly when receiving reports of sexual harassment.
- Develop a sexual harassment policy for the school district.
- Creatively communicate the policy and complaint procedures to all staff, students, and parents. Include the policy in all handbooks, giving equal space compared to other policies to ensure sufficient

continued

Percentage of students positively responding to the question: Have you ever had the following events happen to you in school, that you found offensive?

39%	Students brushing up against you in a sexual way
48%	Suggestive looks or leering
30%	People touching you sexually when you did not want them to
69%	Name calling
34%	Fondling
37%	Sexual threats
35%	Other behavior of a sexual nature that you found offensive

Results from an Ohio survey of 6,173 students in grades 9-12 in 7 School-to-Work regions.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972

- Prohibits school districts receiving federal financial assistance from discriminating against students based on their sex. Sexual harassment falls under this law.
- Protects students, including those participating in employment programs, early placement, advanced placement, or any situation in which the school is involved with the placing of students into employment.
- Holds school districts, administrators, teachers, and even support and custodial staff personally liable if they are found to be in reckless disregard and may require them to pay punitive damages. The vocational school district and its employees are also liable for the treatment of students by customers or clients.

emphasis. Communicate the policy during student and parent orientations, and through role plays, school newsletters and newspapers, and posters.

- Educate students and staff on sexual harassment, its characteristics, ways to prevent it, and strategies to deal with it.
- Create an atmosphere of trust and respect among students and staff.

Resources

Sexual harassment issues are included in the Occupational Competency Analysis Profiles (OCAPs) for Employability Skills. These issues are also included in the "Working Responsibly" strand of the Core Integrated Technical and Academic Competencies (ITACs).

Videos, teaching manuals, and other resources are available through the Sex Equity Resource Library at the Center on Education and Training for Employment, 1900 Kenny Road, Columbus, Ohio 43210-1090; (614) 292-4353 or (800) 848-4815.

Speakers on sexual harassment and other gender equity issues are available through Gender Equity, Career-Technical and Adult Education, Ohio Department of Education.

Definition of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. It usually occurs when one person has formal power (supervisory) over another, but it can also occur when one person has informal power (i.e. size, perceived popularity, tenure) over another. Sexual harassment often occurs when:

1. submitting to the conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly as a term or condition of an individual's employment *or educational program*;
2. submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment *or educational* decision affecting such individual;
3. such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work *or academic performance* or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working *or educational* environment.

Source: EEOC, 1990; italics by author

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For more information contact Gender Equity, Ohio Career-Technical and Adult Education, Ohio Department of Education, 65 S. Front St., Columbus, OH 43215-4183; (614) 644-6238.

Published by The Ohio State University, College of Human Ecology, 1787 Neil Ave., Columbus, Ohio 43210 and supported by federal funds of PL 101-392 through the Ohio Department of Education, Office of Career-Technical and Adult Education. Pat Clark, Editor.

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